

PATHFINDER

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THE REALITY OF AIR POWER AND IRREGULAR WARFARE WHAT'S IN A NAME ? 'IRREGULAR WARFARE' AND 'COUNTERINSURGENCY'

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001 the United States and its coalition partners, including Australia, have been involved in a range of military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa under various banners including the *Global War on Terror* (GWOT), the *International Coalition Against Terrorism* (ICAT) and the *Long War*. The scope, and in many cases the ferocity, of these operations has led many Western nations to reassess their military structures and modus operandi and shift their focus from conventional—or regular—warfighting to developing capabilities that can better meet the challenges of *Irregular Warfare*.

Irregular Warfare—which includes counterterrorism, insurgency support, counterinsurgency, shaping and deterring, and a number of other non-conventional warfighting techniques—is not new. IW operations typically use conventional military forces against an unconventionally formed, but complex, adaptive adversary, with a structure that reflects the manifold sources of their origin—be it nationalism, ideology, ethnic tensions or religious fanaticism, to name a few.

Many doctrine and concepts publications use the terms *Irregular Warfare* (IW) and *Counterinsurgency* (COIN) interchangeably to describe conflicts that do not fit the definition of conventional warfare. However, the two terms do not mean the same thing, and as a result, air forces have generally adopted the term IW and land forces have opted for COIN. These preferences are based on much more than semantics; indeed, they are indicative of how the respective Services view their roles in this type of conflict.

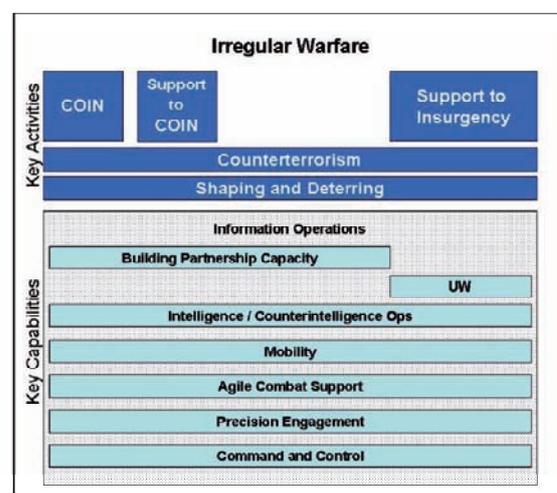
Currently, there is no joint Australian IW or COIN doctrine or definitions—but the Australian Army has drafted *LWD 3-0-1—Counterinsurgency* as developing doctrine. When there is no joint ADF definition, the standard practice is to use the NATO definition and as such, NATO's *AAP-6(2009)* gives the definition for COIN as: 'those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency.' There is no NATO IW definition.

The US armed forces have defined *Irregular Warfare* in their publication *JP 1-02* as: 'a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favours indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence and will.' The same publication describes COIN as: 'those military, paramilitary, political,

economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency'—basically the same as the NATO definition. It is believed that this definition will be further refined in the soon to be released US joint doctrine on COIN. (The relevant US Army and US Marine Corps doctrine is *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5—Counterinsurgency* and the US Air Force doctrine is *AFDD 2-3—Irregular Warfare*.)

From these definitions it is apparent that IW is broader in its scope and encompasses a very wide spectrum of non-conventional warfare. In contrast, COIN is very specific and deals with the actions a government takes to counter a threat to its legitimacy and authority. This distinction shapes the Services' view of how their respective capabilities can be applied to the joint campaign.

The primary focus of COIN doctrine or concepts of operation is the use of a land-centric force in a campaign to establish or restore a government's authority and legitimacy through securing the nation. Air forces recognise the land-centricity of COIN operations and contribute directly through intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), precision attack, air mobility, control of the air, and most importantly, command and control activities. Air power also has the capability to carry out shaping and deterrence operations—either through direct interdiction or by indirect ISR and presence operations. Although it uses US Air Force terminology, the *Irregular Warfare Model* below—drawn from the USAF doctrine, *AFDD 2-3—Irregular Warfare*—provides a useful visual description of IW activities and air power capabilities.



Irregular Warfare Model

The RAAF preference for the term IW is based on the more strategic focus that it provides. As a consequence, the Air Force concentrates on the joint campaign through the multiple functions and roles that they perform, which also encompasses their contribution to COIN operations. For a variety of reasons, such as scarcity of assets, theatre wide responsibilities and multiple tasking, the command of air power is delegated by the Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander to an airman with *professional mastery* of air power, and controlled through an Air and Space Operations Centre (AOC) within the JTF. These air power elements will often contribute to COIN operations while concurrently undertaking other broader IW operations. An example of this is the detachment of RAAF AP-3C aircraft force assigned to OP SLIPPER in the MEAO. These aircraft are capable of contributing concurrently to a number of IW tasks across the MEAO that may include overland ISR, maritime patrol and anti-piracy operations. It is therefore important for air forces to approach non-conventional conflict with a broad view instead of focusing purely on only one component of the spectrum of conflict.



An RAAF C-17 landing at Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan

Australia's geostrategic environment is also a determinant regarding the range of IW tasks that impact on its border security in the littoral and maritime approaches to the nation, wherein the RAAF contributes a range of ISR and response capabilities. These operations are carried out within a whole-of-government approach to national security that relies on a number of agencies, not just the ADF. These operations are as vital to countering unconventional threats to Australia's security such as operations in Afghanistan or nation building in East Timor.

In examining the doctrine that guides IW and COIN operations, it is important to keep in mind the fact that although COIN operations have been at the forefront of recent Western military activities, it is not their exclusive role. Within IW, support for, rather than against an insurgency or civil uprising, through either direct or indirect means, may also be viewed as legitimate when

the government being targeted is hostile, oppressive or belligerent towards its people or other nations. Australia's own experience of irregular warfare, both within conventional and non-conventional wars, highlights the limitations of rigidly categorising conflicts. Australian forces have provided support and made common cause with partisan forces during both World Wars. Australians, including the airmen of No 1 Squadron AFC, fought alongside the irregular tribesmen in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in during World War I. Similarly, the ADF contributed to the US OP ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan by supporting the Northern Alliance of anti-Taliban Afghan forces alongside the US forces (predominantly air power, special forces and the CIA) that removed the Taliban Government in 2001.

There is an acknowledged need to develop both joint and single Service doctrine to guide the conduct of non-conventional conflict. Whether the ADF should follow the IW or COIN path in this process would appear to be largely moot on closer examination because there is a need for both. The RAAF uses the term *Irregular Warfare* as it provides a broader strategic and more coherent operational foundation for its involvement in non-conventional conflict.

The APDC is currently undertaking significant work on air power in *Irregular Warfare* and is currently developing IW concepts, doctrine and education for the RAAF.

- *Although used inter-changeably, Irregular Warfare and Counterinsurgency do not mean the same thing.*
- *For air forces, Irregular Warfare doctrine is the strategic foundation for their involvement in non-conventional conflicts.*
- *The RAAF will use the term Irregular Warfare as it provides a broader strategic and more coherent operational foundation for its involvement in non-conventional conflict.*

'The first, the supreme, the more far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking.'

Carl von Clausewitz



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